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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

In Today's Papers

Turkish Airliner Crashes when Landing at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport
Media outlets report that on Wednesday, a Turkish Airlines (THY) Boeing 737-800 passenger plane crash-landed at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, killing nine people, including three pilots, and injuring 50 others. A Dutch official said aboard the plane were 135 passengers including one baby and seven crew members. Six of the injured are in critical condition, while 24 were slightly injured. The plane flew over the highway and crashed into a muddy field and not the highway, which would have been a huge disaster, report papers. Experts hailed the pilot Hasan Tahsin Arisan and the co-pilot Murat Sezer, for the toll could have been much higher if the plane had not landed in mud, which reduced the impact and helped avert a fire from breaking out in the fuel tanks. A high-level THY official told Hurriyet, "It cost his and his friends' lives, but pilot Arikan saved dozens of people. Few pilots in the world can land a plane traveling at a speed of 200 km/hour on such ground." Hurriyet says on its front page "He Prevented a Disaster" below Arisan's picture. Aksam daily's headline is "They Died As They Saved Others' Lives." Kieran Daly of Air Transport Intelligence said, "The Turkish aviation industry has a pretty good record of safety." "THY is rated a four star airline by Skytrax, the same rating as Virgin Airways and British Airways," say industry research advisors to the world airline and air transport industry.

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Plane Crash

Oktay Eksi wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "Eventually, we will find out the cause of the plane crash. But this unfortunate event should make us all realize once again the importance of first aid training and of being organized and prepared for emergencies. Unless we improve on these areas, we may have to feel sorry many more times in the future."

Melih Asik wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "While thinking about the crash, let's also remember the warning from the Union of Airplane Laborers. Well before this sad event, the Union has advocated for the importance of having licensed technical personnel. Turkish

airlines has increased its fleet by 30 percent, but the number of licensed technical staff has remained the same in number."

U.S. 2008 Human Rights Report Covers the Pressure on Media in Turkey

Milliyet, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet: Mainstream Milliyet reports that the government pressure exerted on the Turkish media was covered in the U.S. 2008 Human Rights Report. The report drew attention to the prime minister's harsh criticism of the outlets who reported on the Deniz Feneri charity fraud case, "The PM harshly criticized the media organizations who alleged connections between the ruling AKP and Deniz Feneri in Germany. Several businessmen who own holdings as well as media organizations are scared to criticize the AKP government with a concern that they will lose their businesses if they do so." The report also drew attention to the Ergenekon Case and said that many media members, businessmen and military personnel were arrested without any indictment." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet noted that the report said "freedoms in Turkey are getting curtailed while torture is on the rise."

Erdogan to The Guardian: "Iran Is Asking for Turkey's Help to Mend Ties with the U.S."

Media outlets report Prime Minister Erdogan told the Guardian Iranian officials asked Turkey to mediate between Tehran and Washington while George Bush was in office, and that he delivered the message to the White House. Speaking to the British daily aboard his plane, Erdogan said he was considering raising the matter with President Obama, who has said he wants to engage with Iran at a G-20 summit in London in April. "If the U.S. also wants and asks us to play this role, we are ready to do it," Erdogan said. In the

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interview, Erdogan also renewed his criticism of Israel's Gaza offensive and challenged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to recognize the Palestinians' right to have their own state. "We are for a two-state solution: Palestine and Israel. Not only Hamas, but Israel has to accept this as well," said Erdogan. He said an Israeli-Palestinian settlement had to include Hamas, which he calls "the party of change and reform." Erdogan said his walkout at Davos was inspired by his "conscience" and a desire to be the "voice for the voiceless, and the protector of the people who cannot protect themselves." On the Armenian diaspora's claims of genocide, Erdogan said he did not believe the U.S. Congress would make a decision "based on emotions."

Babacan: Turkey Ready to Help the U.S. Withdraw from Iraq
Media outlets report Foreign Minister Ali Babacan told a Wednesday luncheon held by the Foreign Economic Relations Council in Istanbul that Turkey was "ready to talk about possible requests" on the issue of a U.S. troop pullout from Iraq. "We have to help and provide assistance," said Babacan. On whether a troop withdrawal through Turkey would require parliamentary consent, he said the legalities would be discussed when a request came from Washington. As to Washington's call on its NATO allies to send more troops to Afghanistan, Babacan indicated the reluctance of Turkey to contribute more troops, stressing instead the need to win "the hearts and minds of the Afghan people." On a question on the return of France into NATO's military structure, Babacan said the details of the return were still "unclear." "We want all member countries to participate in all NATO activities," he said, adding, "When the details are discussed, there will be a give-and-take between NATO and France."

U.S. Special Envoy for the Middle East George Mitchell in Ankara
Sabah, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak, Milliyet: Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports that U.S. Special Envoy to the Mid East George Mitchell had meetings with Gul and Babacan as he wanted to check Ankara's pulse on Turkey's role in the region. It was learned that Mitchell told Gul, "The U.S. needs Turkey's views and support on the Middle East." Ambassador Jeffrey attended the meetings. Mainstream Sabah reports that during the Gul-Mitchell meeting yesterday Gul told Mitchell, "We are meeting with all parties in order to reach an agreement in Palestine. That was the reason I hosted Palestine leader Abbas in Ankara recently." Gul added that "Turkey supports Egypt's peace efforts" and he had "met with Hamas officials in Ankara" when he was the FM. Sabah quotes President Gul as saying "I

told Hamas then that they won the elections and from now on they should fulfill their political responsibilities and contribute to peace efforts within the framework of democracy." According to papers, FM Babacan told Mitchell Turkey is the U.S.' strategic partner and Turkey wants a continuation of this, Turkey is deeply interested in the Mid East, the ME Peace Process should be accelerated but first of all the cease fire between Hamas and Israel should be established, a peaceful agreement should be established between the Palestinian leaders, and Gaza borders should be opened not only with Egypt but also with Israel.

In a related story, Sabah reported that Amb. Jeffrey met with Turkey's Chief EU negotiator Egemen Bagis yesterday. Sabah and Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak report Jeffrey told Bagis, "The U.S. supports Turkey's EU process. Turkey's future is very important for us and the West also will have an important role in its future."

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- Opposition far right MHP leader Devlet Bahceli says the DTP leader Ahmet Turk's address in Kurdish in the parliament was "treachery" and should not be left unpunished.

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- Ergenekon suspect Tuncay Ozkan filed a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights over violations of his rights in his detention procedures.

- On Friday, Deputy Prime Minister Nazim Ekren will hold a meeting with ambassadors to Turkey from the EU.

- The Financial Times reports Turkish tourism officials hope that currency advantage will tempt holidaymakers to Turkey.

World

- President Obama will reportedly announce later this week that he will order all U.S. combat troops out of Iraq by August 2010.

- Iran tests its first nuclear power plant using "dummy" fuel rods, loaded with lead in place of enriched uranium to simulate nuclear fuel.

- Radio Netherlands Worldwide says "if Turkish businessmen no longer need a visa to enter Europe, there will be soon 70 million businessmen in Turkey."

- Russian President Dmitry Medvedev orders a crackdown on extremist groups sowing unrest during Russia's economic crisis.

JEFFREY